



## Identifying and Healing the Invisible Wounds of Traumatic Stress Injuries in Police Officers

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"Dedicated to providing trauma and stress-related  
services to police and their families"

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## Outline

- Lunch 11:30AM to 1:00PM
- Traumatic Stress Overview
  - What is traumatic stress?
  - How does traumatic stress impact you?
  - What do researchers know about traumatic stress in police officers?
- Returning Police Combat Veterans
  - How do skills essential to soldiers developing a combat mind to survive cause problems for officers returning to policing?
  - How does the police work environment shape guiding beliefs that can interact with combat experiences and breed police problems?

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## Outline

- Selection, Training, and Treatment
  - Preemployment screening
  - Training from preservice to treatment
  - Transition guide from pre- to post-military deployment
  - Evidence-based treatment approaches
  - Peer support teams and agency support

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## Police Code of Ethics

- As a law enforcement officer, my fundamental duty is to serve mankind; to safeguard lives and property; to protect the innocent against deception, the weak against oppression or intimidation, and the peaceful against violence and disorder; and to respect the Constitutional rights of all men to liberty, equality, and justice.
- I will keep my private life unsullied as an example to all; maintain courageous calm in the face of danger, scorn, or ridicule; develop self-restraint; and be constantly mindful of the welfare of others; honest in thought and deed in both my personal and official life. I will be exemplary in obeying the laws of the land and the regulations of my department. Whatever I see or hear of a confidential nature or that is confided in me in my official capacity will be kept ever secret unless revelation is necessary in the performance of my duty.

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## Police Code of Ethics

- I will never act officiously or permit personal feelings, prejudices, animosities, or friendships to influence my decision. With no compromise for crime and with relentless prosecution of criminals, I will enforce the law courageously and appropriately without fear or favor, malice, or ill will, never employing unnecessary force or violence, and never accepting gratuities.
- I recognize the badge of my office as a symbol of public faith, and I accept it as a public trust to be held so long as I am true to the ethics of the police service. I will constantly strive to achieve those objectives and ideals, dedicating myself before God to my profession-law enforcement.

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**What is Trauma?**  
**What is traumatic stress?**  
**What is PTSD?**

"Dedicated to providing trauma and stress-related services to police and their families"

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## Trauma

- Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence that might overwhelm a person's ability to respond
- Traumatic events might be ordinary or extraordinary life experiences

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## Trauma

- Thinking about the alarm signal triggers the stress response
- Strength of the alarm signal
  - Severity of the threat
  - The probability of the threat occurring if you take no protective action
  - The probability of your protective action working

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## Traumatic Stress

- Stress is your nervous system's natural accelerator: HPA axis
  - Excitation of the hypothalamus causes the synthesis and secretion of corticotropin-releasing factor (CRF)
  - Which in turn excites the pituitary gland to synthesize and secrete adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH)
  - Which in turn excites the adrenal gland to synthesize and secrete adrenocortical glucocorticoids: epinephrine (adrenaline), norepinephrine (noradrenaline), and other adrenally derived neuroactive steroids such as cortisol (corticosteroid hormone or glucocorticoid)

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### Myth or Fact

- Stress is the same for everyone
  - True
  - False

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### Myth or Fact

- Stress is always bad for you
  - True
  - False

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### Myth or Fact

- Stress comes from your circumstances
  - True
  - False

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## Myth or Fact

- Stress is anxiety
  - True
  - False

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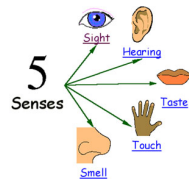
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## Traumatic Stress

- During a traumatic event: you might experience different thoughts and feelings
  - Adrenaline rush, disbelief, fear for self, fear for others, horror, helplessness, a need to survive, shut down
- During a traumatic event: you might experience perceptual distortions
  - Tunnel vision, diminished/intensified sound, heightened visual detail, time passing more slowly or quickly than usual, dissociation



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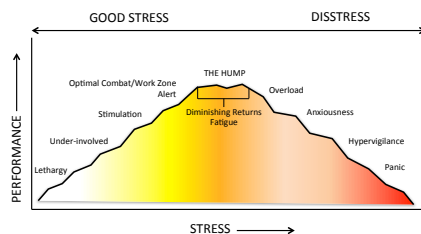
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## Traumatic Stress



Action Curve

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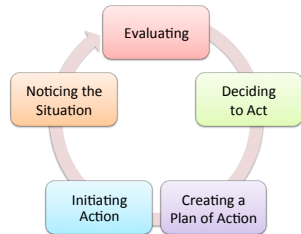
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## Traumatic Stress



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## Traumatic Stress

- In its immediate aftermath: you might experience
  - Feeling shut down, numb, no longer having the ability to feel
  - Feeling out of it or in a daze, having a sense that the world is somehow different now or feeling disconnected from it
  - Experiencing a change in self-awareness like feeling not yourself
  - Forgetting details or important aspects of the event
  - Experiencing physical reactions such as crying and nausea

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## Traumatic Stress

- As time passes
  - You might continue to experience distressing reactions associated with the traumatic event
  - Stress effects might go unresolved or might get worse over time and develop into a traumatic stress injury

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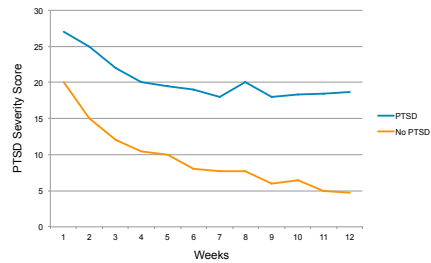
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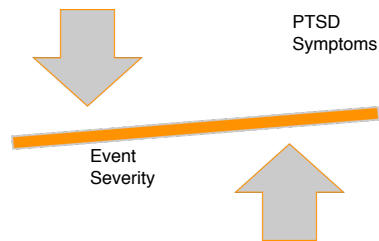
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## PTSD



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## PTSD



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## PTSD

- Trauma- and stressor-related condition DSM V
- Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence
  - Intrusive behaviors
  - Avoidance behaviors
  - Negative mental/affective/emotional behaviors
  - Arousal behaviors

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## PTSD

- Intrusive behaviors: you might experience some repeated upsetting behaviors like
  - Remembering the event (e.g., images or thoughts)
  - Dreaming about the event
  - Acting like the event was happening again and responding to it losing some sense of your surroundings (e.g., flashback)
  - Feeling, hearing sounds, seeing pictures, places, or people reminding you of the event
  - Reacting physiologically to reminders of the event (e.g., sweating, increased heart rate), which are typically protective responses to defend yourself against a memory

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## PTSD

- Avoidance behaviors: you might do some avoiding like staying away from
  - Thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the event
  - Activities, places, or people that reminds you of the event

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## PTSD

- Negative mental/affective/emotional behaviors: you might engage in repeated negative and painful mental/affective/emotional behaviors like
  - Forgetting or difficulty remembering parts of the event
  - Exaggerating beliefs about yourself, others, or the world (e.g., "I'm a bad person," "I can't trust anyone," "The world is completely dangerous.")
  - Distorting beliefs about the cause or consequences of the event leading to blaming yourself or other

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## PTSD

- Feeling fear, horror, anger, guilt, or shame for example
- Feeling no or little interest in doing things you used to do or would like to do
- Feeling disconnected or distant from others
- Persistent negative feeling might also lead to some extent an absence of happiness, satisfaction, or loving feelings.

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## PTSD



- Arousal behaviors: you might have problems with increased levels of arousal leading to
  - Difficulty falling or staying asleep, or restless during sleep
  - Being irritable more than usual
  - Aggressive or angry outbursts and then collapsing into numbness
  - Difficulties concentrating
  - Hypervigilance or looking out more than usual for threat
  - Easily startled by sudden noises or people unexpectedly coming up behind you

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## PTSD

### Cycle of:

Fight-  
Flight-  
Freeze

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## Myths

- Traumatic experiences are uncommon
- Stress reactions to trauma are signs of "weak character"
- Everyone will need therapy after experiencing a traumatic event
- PTSD is not a medical condition
- A posttraumatic stress injury like PTSD is a life sentence: once people suffer with it, they'll never recover

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## Screening: Interview

- Clinician Administered PTSD Scale (CAPS)
- Acute Stress Disorder Interview (ASDI)
- Posttraumatic Symptom Scale--Interview Version (PSS-I)

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## Screening: Self-Report

- National Stressful Events Survey PTSD Short Scale (NSESSS)
- Acute Stress Disorder Scale (ASDS)
- Trauma History Scale (THS)
- Life Events Checklist (LEC)

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## Treatment

- Treatments are available
  - EMDR
  - PE
  - CPT
  - CBT
  - ACT

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## What Do We Know about Traumatic Stress in Police Officers?

"Dedicated to providing trauma and stress-related  
services to police and their families"

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## What We Know

- Stress is an inherent part of policing
- Potential for trauma in policing is real
- Stress response to trauma is a double-edged sword

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## What We Know

- Somewhere between 70 and 85% of police officers have a prior trauma history (Buchanan, Stephens, & Long, 2001; Huddleston, Paton, & Stephens, 2006)
- More than half of U.S. adults (50% to 60%) experience one or more traumatic events during their lifetime (Kessler, Sonnega, Bromet, Hughes, & Nelson, 1995)



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## What We Know

- Police work factors that increase the risk of trauma exposure
  - Danger
  - Shift work
  - Public apathy
  - Feelings of uselessness
  - Dealing with human tragedy and death (Spielberger, Westberry, Grier, & Greenfield, 1981)



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## What We Know

- Work events
  - Shootings
  - Witnessing death
  - Disasters
  - Abused children (Violanti & Aron, 1994)



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## What We Know

- PTSD rates vary from 7 to 20%  
(Carlier, Lamberts, & Gersons, 2000; Carlier, Lamberts, Gersons, & Berthold, 1997; Hodgins, Creamer, & Bell, 2001)
  - Rates may be a function of department size and workload
- General adult U.S. population, the lifetime prevalence of PTSD is 6.8%  
(Kessler, Berglund, Demler, Jin, Merikangas, & Walters, 2005)



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## What We Know

- Adult females may be at a greater risk for developing PTSD than males (O'Toole, Marshall, Schureck, & Dobson, 1998; Kessler et al. 2005; Halligan & Yehuda, 2000)
- Recovery from specific trauma types and severity may be more challenging and explain some of differences between males and females: exposure to combat and physical assaults happens more among males whereas females experience rape and other sexual assaults more (Breslau, Chilcoat, Kessler, Peterson, & Lucia, 1999; Freedman, Gluck, Tuval-Mashiach, Brandes, Peri, & Shalev, 2002; Fullerton et al., 2001)

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## What We Know

- In police settings, female officers may experience more traumatic events compared to their male counterparts (Patterson, 2001)
  - However, the role of female as a risk factor in the course of PTSD or influencing vulnerability is unclear now

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## What We Know

- Combating transnational and domestic terrorism today reflects the changing nature of American policing
  - A risk factor for trauma during the police career course (Creamer & Liddle, 2005; North et al., 2002)
- Novelty, complexity, and uncertainty of acts of terrorism may increase traumatic stress risk (Paton et al., 2010)

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## What We Know

- Unchecked or unresolved traumatic stress may lead to problems in functioning and adaptability
  - On the job (e.g., excessive use of force or use of excessive force, absenteeism, poor performance)
  - Off the job (e.g., family disruption, isolation, alcohol or drug abuse)

☐ a  
☐ b  
☐ c

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## What We Know

- Escape or avoidance behaviors like using alcohol or drugs are defensive solutions police often try to escape stress (Fridell & Binder, 1992; Violanti, 1993)
- Police culture reinforces using alcohol as a social, and psychological approach to dealing with job stressors and surviving the work shift (Violanti, 2003)

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## What We Know

- Chronic PTSD and persistent emotional numbing coupled with using alcohol or drugs may make suicide an attractive and easy escape option for some officers (Paton, Violanti, Burke, & Gehrke, 2009)
- Most officers though choose to live



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## What We Know

- Traumatic stress in police officers arises not only from occupational duties, but also from the culture of the police occupation
- Police culture is an important antecedent of stress risk in and recovery from trauma

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## What We Know

- Culture
  - Commonly held meanings
  - Universal to the group
  - Learned and taught
  - Transform and regulate
    - Understanding
    - Relationships
    - Expectations

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## What We Know

- Beliefs about police work may shape, maintain, and amplify traumatic stress in police officers
  - Danger
  - Toughness
  - Social isolation

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## What We Know

- Danger
  - Where do police learn about the dangers of policing?
  - What world views do they develop?
  - How are officers hardwired?
  - What is the Paradox of Danger?
  - What are the possible consequences of an evolutionary and conditioned work preoccupation with danger?

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## What We Know

- Toughness
  - A logical consequence of a worldview emphasizing danger
  - Police selection process
  - Traditional role of being male
  - What does it mean to be tough?
  - What are the costs to perceived weakness?

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## What We Know

- Social Isolation
  - Separateness as a guiding belief
  - Ingroup-outgroup bias
  - May extend to non-trauma police counterparts and family members
  - Social isolation may become a self-imposed consequence

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## From Battlefield to Street

Reintegration Challenges  
for Returning Police  
Combat Veterans

"Dedicated to providing trauma and stress-related  
services to police and their families"

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## Numbers

- 17,876 state and local law enforcement agencies (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2004)
- 23% had Guard and Reserve service members who were called to active duty (Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics, 2003)

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### **Veteran Attributes**

- Patriotism
- Maturity
- Preparedness
- Physical Fitness
- Firearms
- Defensive Tactics
- Decision-making
- Leadership
- Performance & Stress
- Threat Assessment
- Courage
- Discipline

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### **Perspective Taking**

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### **Perspective Taking**

- For some of these soldiers and veteran officers, much of their time might be spent alternating between trying to kill and trying not to get killed

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## Perspective Taking

- 1 minute = 60 moments
- 1 hour = 3,600 moments
- 1 day = 86,400 moments
- 1 year = 31,536,000 moments
- 4 years = 126,144,000 moments

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## Transition Issues

- Performance impact
- Distress and discomfort
- Tolerance for civilians
- Family frustrations
- Challenges with leadership

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## Distress and Discomfort

- Orientating: "When I'm in a crowd, if people start flanking me I move back and make sure no one can sneak up on me... In a situation like that, there should always be a bumper behind you. Even at small gatherings, even when we have a cookout, I try to stay back. If I go to a bar, I will sit at the end of the bar away from everyone and, if it is packed, then I'm leaving."

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## Distress and Discomfort

- Orientating: "When you get back your senses are more heightened. You need to focus on the fact that you are not in a combat environment and that you are providing a professional service. Heightened senses make sure that the officer goes home at night, but negatively it could cause them to over-react or re-experience something that happened to them during deployment."

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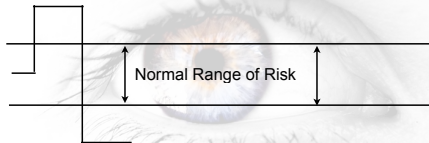
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## Distress and Discomfort

On-Duty: Alive, Alert, Energetic, Involved, Quick Thinking



Off-Duty: Tired, Detached, Isolated, Apathetic, Angry

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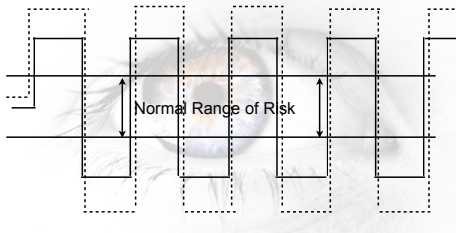
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## Distress and Discomfort




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## Distress and Discomfort

Possibility Thinking



Probability Thinking



Absolutely Thinking

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## Performance Impact

- Muscle Memory: "I don't like driving over potholes because in Iraq they would put explosive devices in potholes and then pour concrete over them. And still, I have problems driving over potholes, and anything in the road that looks like it shouldn't be there."

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## Performance Impact

- Crowds: "...I responded to gun fire. There was an 11 year-old gunshot victim. I get there, and chaos is breaking out, there is a crowd. They are all asking questions, pushing to get on the scene. And I thought I was back in Iraq. I thought I was going to lose my control. And there are people surrounding you, and everyone wants something. I started pushing people, and that is when you have to gain your composure, and I was able to stop and say 'I know why they are like this; it is an 11-year-old.'

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## Performance Impact

- “In Iraq you would fire a couple shots in the air to push the crowds back. But here it would be to push the yellow tape back and request backup... And in Iraq, I have had people come into your truck and take your food or equipment. And you fire a couple of shots, but here you can't do that. It is real hard, especially when you have just come back from a tour. It is hard for your mind to transition from a military to a law mode... I did not act on my impulse like it was Iraq, I actually physically stepped back to my patrol car and watched things for awhile and I was able to clear my mind. It wasn't that I didn't know where I was, it was more I felt overwhelmed by all the screaming. I was more nervous because of having to deal with crowds in Iraq.”

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## Performance Impact

- War Fighter vs. Peacekeeper: “In SWAT, no one can get shot. When we enter a building or room in the military we yelled ‘down’ and shot anyone who didn’t, but not in SWAT. You have to make a judgment call. By military standards, I am successful if I take less than 13 percent casualties but in SWAT, you can’t take any casualties.”

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## Performance Impact

*“They don’t understand.  
I’m different than them.”*

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## Tolerance

- Apathy: "I have no tolerance for people asking me for directions. Someone stopped me and I said, 'Why can't you just leave me alone?' I have this 'I don't care' attitude. I don't want to waste my time with disabled vehicles because I want to go catch the bad guys. I have less tolerance for the minor things, and they should be just as important."

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## Family

- Frustration: "Over there dealing with family stuff was frustrating. We were like, 'We don't have the time to deal with this stuff.' Our tolerance for dealing with stuff back at home was lower. The stress and focus was on trying to get back home... Dealing with family problems, when I got home, at first my family really didn't bother me with stuff; it was more about quality time. My tolerance for noise, I was like, 'I need alone time, leave me be.' ...tolerance is still low for everyday life."

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## Leadership

- Leadership: "I expect a lot from someone in a leadership position. You expect them to conduct themselves in a certain way and when they don't I get frustrated. Coming out of the [military], I have certain standards on how they should behave. It irritates me more now. I see a lot of things. It seems I pick up on the double standard a lot more now."

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## Leadership

- Command and Patrol: “In Iraq, no one ever questioned you; you did things the way you wanted. In law enforcement, you can’t do that, you have to remember to take it down.”
- “Overseas you can just make a decision, but here you have to go through all the admin layers before you can make a decision.”

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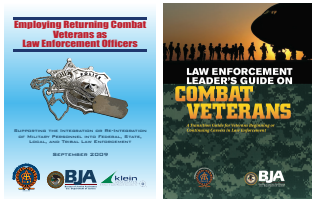
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## Resources



<http://www.theiacp.org/PublicationsGuides/Projects/EmployingReturningCombatVeterans>  
<https://www.bja.gov/publications/lawemployingreturningvets.pdf>

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## Establishing a Continuity of Training: From Preservice to Treatment

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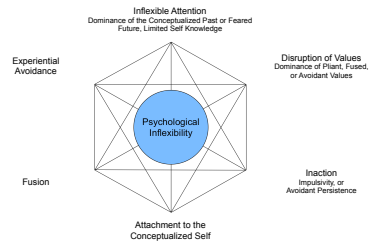
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## Model of Problems



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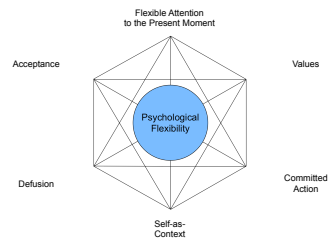
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## Model of Health



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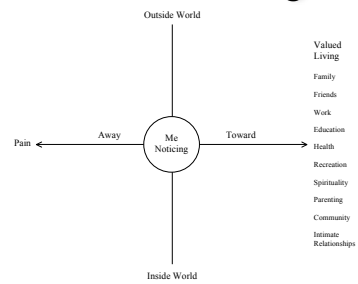
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## Model of Training



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## Contact Information

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